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ABSTRACT

A number of possible scenarios are discernible for the future of post-secondary education. Some believe that the next five years will be worse than the last, pointing to declining birthrates, spiraling inflation, and plummeting enrollments. Others look optimistically to the increased need for education, which is evidenced by the involvement of industry in educational efforts and the rate at which knowledge is growing and becoming obsolete. Still others try to assess the effects of environmental factors, such as increased state control and federal regulation, changing technologies, and growth in adult and non-formal education. In order to survive the stresses and strains of the 1980's, community colleges must undergo a transformation, which will be facilitated by their responsiveness to community needs and their flexibility. They must: (1) provide additional access for the older adult: (2) exploit new educational technologies: (3) work with and through other community agencies: (4) increase cooperation with business and labor: (5) provide basic skills and literacy training: (6) become involved in international education: (7) change policies and procedures to meet the needs of part-time, older students: and (8) reaffirm their commitment to the humanities. In short, the 1980's will demand that community colleges employ creativity to a greater extent than ever before. (AYC)

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Having just emerged from the decade of the 70's, are we really ready to face the challenges of the 80's?

The 70's were christened the "Me decade" by that literary flower child, Tom Wolfe, sometime early in the decade. We were described as a nation of narcissists by the Harvard sociologist, Christopher Lasch. We had pet rocks, pop rocks, punk rock and Rocky. Small cars became beautiful. We dropped our frills and based our zeros.

In gazing into the crystal ball, it is possible to discern a number of possible scenarios for the future.

Whichever one you select, it is probable that we will be able to generalize to this extent: the future simply won't be what it used to be.

One possible scenario, and one that has been adopted by many in this country, is that the next five years will be worse than the last. This can be described as the malaise of the downhill slope. It echoes a public mood of doubt and skepticism. Orwell's nightmare is less than four years distant. We are rapidly running out of energy, we have depleted our nonrenewable resources, our productivity is on a downward spiral while inflation is in a dizzying upward climb. The birthrate has dropped alarmingly in the U.S. yet is virtually unchecked in the third world countries where food supplies are low and hunger is a constant. Enrollments in postsecondary education are destined to plummet by 25 percent or more, and taxpayer revolts will cripple our ability to provide programs and services. If you care to add such natural catastrophes as earthquakes, floods, tornadoes, and hurricanes, and such man-made phenomena as atomic warfare to the scenario, you will pretty adequately describe apocalypse now.

But this is by no means the only scenario. The story is told of two men, one American, one African, both trained in economics at an American university. They reunite in the African's homeland and they drive out of town. The American admires the clean air and the big sky and the acacia trees. They look back at the African capital and the American asks, "What would you most like to see there?" And the African says, "Smog."

At the present time some 116 million people are involved in some type of organized learning in the United States. Indeed, education is one of the great enterprises in the United States today. No other country in the world has poured the resources into mass education that the

United States has. Richard E. Peterson, senior research psychologist with the Educational Testing Service, estimates that about 70 million of the 116 million in education are in schools and colleges, and 46 million are partaking of education offered by other organizations. Peterson's research indicates that about 64 million people are participating in postsecondary education, with roughly 18 million of those enrolled in educational institutions and 46 million in postsecondary education learning.

Does business and industry believe in education? Each year business and industry is spending some 30 to 40 billion dollars on education, and this does not include wages and salaries for the release time granted to employees. The American Society for Training and Development is a thriving organization, now representing nearly 36,000 members.

Skilled workers in the past had their skills for life. Skilled workers in the future will have to attend school at least four times in their lives to be totally trained.

According to a recent report from the American Management Association, almost half of a group of 2,700 successful executives surveyed were discontented in their jobs and had either considered or executed a career change during the previous five-year period. A recent survey by the American Institute of Research indicated that 40 percent of male blue collar workers desired career changes in mid-life.

The electrical workers' union is now rewriting their textbooks because 20 percent of the knowledge becomes obsolete each year.

By 1985, the microprocessor will give way to the nano-processor (that is one-billionth). Right behind it will be the pico-processor (pico means one-trillionth), which will involve circuits at the molecular level. If these processors were combined with memory data, implanted in the skull and interfaced with the brain, it is said that it could give one person more computer power than exists in the world today.

A recently developed bit of technology is what is being called the "hot transistor," or the "Love Bug." This is a small electrical device, about the size of a cigarette holder. It promises to do for the prowling single what rubbing its legs together does for the cricket. When purchased, it comes with two electrical chips: one prepared to describe him (or her), the other his (or her) match (sex, age, race, religion, income, hobbies, horoscope, etc.). The purchaser goes out into the "singles" world, secure in the knowledge that he (or she) need never be lonely again, as long as the batteries are charged. Market price: $140.

Robert Hidard, specialist for the Federal Communications Commission, has said, "At the rate at which knowledge is growing, by the time the child born today graduates from college, the amount of knowledge in the world will be four times as great. By the time that same child is 50 years old, it will be 32 times as great, and 97 percent of everything known in the world will have been learned since the child was born."

On the other hand, a Ford Foundation study indicates that 18-64 million U.S. adults are illiterate, while 15 percent have serious reading problems. Fifty-seven million Americans are functionally illiterate, and an additional 34 million are able to function, but not proficiently.

It is unthinkable that in the last two decades of a rapidly moving twentieth century, individuals lacking such basic skills as reading, writing, and mathematics will be able to cope successfully with the society in which we will be living.

Perhaps we should pause for a moment to look at some of the environmental factors that will in all probability be influencing our decisions in the future.

Kiplinger--Austin Kiplinger--in projecting for the future, believes that the 80's will be a period of concern for colleges and universities. He feels that enrollments will continue to taper off, financing will be tougher, fewer high school graduates will apply, and that more older students will enroll. He believes there will be a surge in the number of women attending and that by the end of the decade, women will far outnumber men in colleges and universities. These are all a continuation of trends already evident.

Other environmental factors which should be noted are: a movement toward state control and state financing; increasing Federal influence and regulation; greater impingement of international problems on our daily lives; extremely rapidly changing technologies; greater growth in adult and nonformal education; rapid increase in the number of working wives; increasing inflation; movement to an even greater extent by business, industry, and labor into education; an explosion in the area of information systems; and the graying of the population.

Many of these factors are interrelated, and in combination they spell out challenges which those of us in community colleges must face.

The Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education takes note of the following factors, which they describe as signs of a new emphasis on survival: lowering of admission requirements; an increased emphasis on retention, regardless of performance; grade inflation; faculty involvement in collective bargaining; more cautious top leadership; internal tensions; the evidence of controversy at all levels; and an aging faculty.

The scenario begins to sound more and more like "The Perils of Pauline." Can the community college survive? Will it continue to be the strong institution it has become during the last several decades?

In my opinion, there is no doubt that the community college can survive the stresses and strains, the pressures and vicissitudes of the 80's. With one caveat: we must change with the times. We have always been in transition as community colleges. I believe what is needed in the 80's is not transition but transformation.

We must undergo a transformation. We will not successfully navigate the 80's with the course charts that served us so well in the 60's and 70's.

The times they are "a-changing," as the saying goes, and the most striking characteristic by far during the 80's will be the rapidity of change.

Kiplinger, again in writing of the 80's, warns that colleges will have to shift directions to meet new needs. Old courses will need to be revamped, new courses developed, more imaginative use will need to be made of communications technology, and attention will need to be stepped up in connection with basic skills.

The Carnegie Policy Committee, in making recommendations for the next two decades, counsels on the importance of maintaining diversity and the necessity for providing more services to the surrounding community.

This is where I would like to pay respect to the League for Innovation in the Community College. The League is committed to trying to keep up, to trying new ideas, to charting new courses, and I believe through such efforts as those being made by the League for Innovation and other organizations of a similar kind, we do have an opportunity to modify directions, to correct course charts, and to move into the future successfully.

What, then, are the hopes for the community college during the 80's? First, we virtually cover the nation, and we are in a position to be highly responsive to needs of the community. Second, we are undoubtedly the most flexible segment of postsecondary education. This has been said repeatedly. I have heard it said by Boyer, I have heard it said by Hodgkinson, I have heard it said by Kerr that the community college is by far the most flexible segment of postsecondary education. If there is any segment of postsecondary education which can change and shift and survive, in my opinion, it certainly will be the community college. Whether we can be flexible enough remains to be seen. Third, we are in an excellent position to provide increased access to the older adult. It is imperative that the community colleges take into full consideration the demographics for the 1980's and 1990's and beyond. While the 18- to 24-year-old age group is shrinking, much attention is being given to the 25- to 54-year-old age group, a natural target for those desiring larger responsibilities, women's reentry programs, and mid-career changes.

Another group, those 55 years of age and older, will grow from 46 million to 55 million between 1980 and the year 2000, a 19.4 percent increase. And the number 55 and over now, who will survive to become 75 and over in the year 2000, will expand by 52.5 percent. The comparable projected increase for the group now 60 and over is 56.4 percent.

We see people living longer, healthier lives these days. I submit that it is entirely possible that in the year 1990 an historian in the field of education may say that the 1980's were the time of the great enrollment boom in colleges and universities throughout the United States--not forseen now, but that boom taking place as the result of institutions becoming responsive and sensitive to the older adult.

So, as longevity is increasing, mental and physical ability is holding up, many older adults are searching desperately for ways in which to play

active and productive roles. The community colleges have a golden opportunity to expand their efforts in creatively furthering the educational needs of the older population in the public interest. It is far more desirable from a social standpoint to enhance the quality of life of older Americans, rather than to effectively disenfranchise them as far as educational opportunities as concerned. They have paid their dues and they deserve their return.

Fourth, community colleges must exploit the new technologies. We are far out in front in the use of television as a delivery system. We need to move together in a concerted effort to take advantage of the new PBS educational channel, PTV 3. With energy shortages becoming even more severe, and with the needs of adults for increased part-time education, television is a tool which must be used to the maximum. Also, courses and programs that have been developed for use on the broadcast medium and on cable can soon be made available on video disks and home cassette players. Within the next decade we will see tremendous development in both the cable and the home satellite receiver. "Do it yourself" rooftop receivers are being advertised for sale at the present time in the Popular Science magazine. The components and instruction booklet can be purchased for $1,000. Assembled at home, the rooftop antenna will permit the owner to receive the multitude of signals coming from the many satellites now in place above the earth. Les Brown of The New York Times describes the future of this technology as an electronic magazine reader with separate channels devoted entirely to sports, news, movies, culture, education, religion, business, public affairs, and programming specifically for children, the elderly, blacks, and Hispanics.

Warner Cable-Vision is currently working on a 125-channel system. The ability to pick and choose at random from hundreds of sources will soon be commonplace. If education is to take advantage of these opportunities, we must organize and be ready.

Fifth, in the list of opportunities for the future is the chance to work with and through other community agencies to attempt to clarify and resolve social needs for the enhancement of quality of life. Community forums are an excellent example of this kind of effort as are courses by newspaper.

Sixth, we need to build on the foundations we have laid for cooperation with business, industry, and labor. Training needs will accelerate during the 80's. In-service training and retraining are important elements in the arsenal of the community colleges, and we need to work more closely than ever with those groups.

Seventh, we must increase our efforts in the area of the basic skills and literacy training. It does little good to blame the deficiencies in this area on others. There is a tremendous job to be done, and we must get on with it.

Eighth is the area of international education. In a shrinking world with finite resources, the countries of the world are becoming more and more interdependent. Our citizens need to know and understand the various cultures in the world, and the problems that face us in the future.

Ninth, we will need to change our policies and procedures as institutions to meet more completely the needs of the part-time, older students. We will need to reexamine the responsiveness of current policies and practices in such areas as admissions, prior credit for experience, career counseling and placement, personal guidance, financial assistance, transportation, teaching methodology, and curriculum in terms of meeting the needs of the new clientele.

Tenth, the community college must review, restate, and reaffirm the mission to the humanities, as the AACJC Assembly report, Strengthening Humanities in Community Colleges, asserts. Joseph Duffey stated, "The humanities are not the sacred province of a select few. They are, instead, the intellectual and spiritual resources by which a society as a whole perceives and gives shape to its cultural life and legacy."

And, finally, we must employ the creative process to a greater extent than we ever have in the past. This is true not only for the community colleges, but for virtually all elements of society. As a nation, we are running out of energy resources. Yet, the most important, the most omnipresent, and the most potent source of energy we have is being utilized at no more than ten percent of its potential. I am speaking, of course, of the mind of man and of our ability to create, invent, and devise new systems and ideas.

Buckminster Fuller says, "There is no energy crisis now. There is a crisis of ignorance and selfishness, but not of energy. The most powerful tool man has"--Fuller goes on to say--"is his mind, but muscle and cunning are still in control of human affairs." If we are to survive and flourish in an era of diminished material resources, we are going to have to discover, develop, and create new sources of power.

Emily Dickinson may have said it best:

> The brain is wider than the sky,
> For, put them side by side,
> The one the other will include
> With care, and you beside.
>
> The brain is deeper than the sea,
> For, hold them, blue to blue,
> The one the other will absorb,
> As sponges, buckets do.
>
> The brain is just the weight of God,
> For, lift them, pound for pound,
> And They will differ, if they do,
> As syllable from sound.
>
> Emily Dickinson, Collected Poems

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